

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN  
NORTHERN DIVISION

LEROY PARKER,

Plaintiff,

v.

Case No. 2:08-cv-8  
HON. R. ALLAN EDGAR

UNKNOWN TURNER, et al.,

Defendants.

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**REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Plaintiff Leroy Parker, an inmate currently confined at the Baraga Maximum Correctional Facility (AMF), filed this *pro se* civil rights action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against Defendants Corrections Officer Unknown Turner and Corrections Officer Unknown Wickstrom. Plaintiff's complaint alleges that on April 12, 2007, Defendant Turner read his mail and harassed him regarding the contents. According to Plaintiff, Defendant Turner also refused to give Plaintiff his mail while other inmates were receiving their mail. Plaintiff claims that Defendant Turner's conduct was in retaliation for the fact that he had previously filed grievances against him. Plaintiff also claims that both Defendants continually degraded and harassed him by denying him food trays and showers, making sexually harassing comments, and retaliating against him for his use of the grievance procedure.

On August 7, 2008, Plaintiff filed a more definite statement in which he claims that on April 17, 2007, Defendant Turner opened Plaintiff's mail and told another Corrections Officer to tell Plaintiff that his aunt, Lenora Wesley, did not know what the hell she was talking about,

causing surrounding inmates to overhear and laugh. Plaintiff then received crumpled mail during mail rounds. Plaintiff asked why his mail was crumpled and Corrections Officer Delene told Plaintiff that Defendant Turner handled the mail for all wings in the housing unit. Plaintiff then filed a grievance on Defendant Turner.

Plaintiff also alleges that on May 7, 2008, Defendant Turner refused to take Plaintiff for his shower, stating that Plaintiff did not have anything coming. Plaintiff states that this conduct violated his right to take three showers per week while in administrative segregation. Plaintiff states that he understood that this was in retaliation for a pending lawsuit against Defendants Turner and Wickstrom. On May 24, 2008, Defendant Turner and another officer were running showers. Plaintiff was standing at the door ready for his shower, but Defendant Turner turned and told the other officer that Plaintiff did not have anything coming because he liked to file grievances on Defendant Turner. Defendant Turner then fabricated a CSJ-278 form stating that Plaintiff was not dressed and ready for his shower. On July 22, 2008, Defendant Turner stopped at Plaintiff's door and said, "Hey Parker. That's all you want is \$25,000? Ha-ha, I've got a trick for you when I pass chow!"

With regard to Defendant Wickstrom, Plaintiff alleges that on January 16, 2007, he was sexually assaulted by Defendant Wickstrom. On March 30, 2007, Defendant Wickstrom "continued to harass Plaintiff." On May 24, 2007, Defendant Wickstrom made sexually explicit comments to Plaintiff while he was on the toilet defecating. Defendant Wickstrom stated, "A young fag taking a shit! Your punk-ass will never make it to general population or get a release as long as I'm here."

Presently before the Court is Defendants' Motion for Summary Judgment, pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 56. Plaintiff has filed a response and the matter is ready for decision. Summary

judgment is appropriate only if the moving party establishes that there is no genuine issue of material fact for trial and that he is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(c); *Celotex Corp. v. Catrett*, 477 U.S. 317, 322-323 (1986). If the movant carries the burden of showing there is an absence of evidence to support a claim or defense, then the party opposing the motion must demonstrate by affidavits, depositions, answers to interrogatories, and admissions on file, that there is a genuine issue of material fact for trial. *Id.* at 324-25. The nonmoving party cannot rest on its pleadings but must present “specific facts showing that there is a genuine issue for trial.” *Id.* at 324 (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(e)). The evidence must be viewed in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party. *Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc.*, 477 U.S. 242, 251-52 (1986). Thus, any direct evidence offered by the plaintiff in response to a summary judgment motion must be accepted as true. *Muhammad v. Close*, 379 F.3d 413, 416 (6th Cir. 2004) (*citing Adams v. Metiva*, 31 F.3d 375, 382 (6th Cir. 1994)). However, a mere scintilla of evidence in support of the nonmovant’s position will be insufficient. *Anderson*, 477 U.S. at 251-52. Ultimately, the court must determine whether there is sufficient “evidence on which the jury could reasonably find for the plaintiff.” *Id.* at 252. *See also Leahy v. Trans Jones, Inc.*, 996 F.2d 136, 139 (6th Cir. 1993) (single affidavit, in presence of other evidence to the contrary, failed to present genuine issue of fact); *cf. Moore, Owen, Thomas & Co. v. Coffey*, 992 F.2d 1439, 1448 (6th Cir. 1993) (single affidavit concerning state of mind created factual issue).

Initially, Defendants state that they are entitled to summary judgment on the events which occurred after Plaintiff filed this suit and which are related in Plaintiff’s response to the order for a more definite statement (docket #18) because Plaintiff could not have exhausted his administrative remedies with regard to these claims prior to filing the complaint. A prisoner’s failure to exhaust his administrative remedies is an affirmative defense, which Defendants have the burden

to plead and prove. *Jones v. Bock*, 127 S. Ct. 910, 919-21 (2007). A moving party without the burden of proof need show only that the opponent cannot sustain his burden at trial. *See Morris v. Oldham County Fiscal Court*, 201 F.3d 784, 787 (6th Cir. 2000); *see also Minadeo v. ICI Paints*, 398 F.3d 751, 761 (6th Cir. 2005). A moving party with the burden of proof faces a “substantially higher hurdle.” *Arnett v. Myers*, 281 F.3d 552, 561 (6th Cir. 2002); *Cockrel v. Shelby County Sch. Dist.*, 270 F.3d 1036, 1056 (6th Cir. 2001). “Where the moving party has the burden -- the plaintiff on a claim for relief or the defendant on an affirmative defense -- his showing must be sufficient for the court to hold that no reasonable trier of fact could find other than for the moving party.” *Calderone v. United States*, 799 F.2d 254, 259 (6th Cir. 1986) (quoting W. SCHWARZER, *Summary Judgment Under the Federal Rules: Defining Genuine Issues of Material Fact*, 99 F.R.D. 465, 487-88 (1984)). The United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit repeatedly has emphasized that the party with the burden of proof “must show the record contains evidence satisfying the burden of persuasion and that the evidence is so powerful that no reasonable jury would be free to disbelieve it.” *Arnett*, 281 F.3d at 561 (quoting 11 JAMES WILLIAM MOORE, ET AL., MOORE’S FEDERAL PRACTICE § 56.13[1], at 56-138 (3d ed. 2000); *Cockrel*, 270 F.2d at 1056 (same)). Accordingly, summary judgment in favor of the party with the burden of persuasion “is inappropriate when the evidence is susceptible of different interpretations or inferences by the trier of fact.” *Hunt v. Cromartie*, 526 U.S. 541, 553 (1999).

Pursuant to the applicable portion of the Prison Litigation Reform Act (PLRA), 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(a), a prisoner bringing an action with respect to prison conditions under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 must exhaust his available administrative remedies. *See Porter v. Nussle*, 534 U.S. 516, 532 (2002); *Booth v. Churner*, 532 U.S. 731, 733 (2001). A prisoner must first exhaust available administrative remedies, even if the prisoner may not be able to obtain the specific type of relief he

seeks in the state administrative process. *See Porter*, 534 U.S. at 520; *Booth*, 532 U.S. at 741; *Knuckles El v. Toombs*, 215 F.3d 640, 642 (6th Cir. 2000); *Freeman v. Francis*, 196 F.3d 641, 643 (6th Cir. 1999). In order to properly exhaust administrative remedies, prisoners must complete the administrative review process in accordance with the deadlines and other applicable procedural rules. *Jones v. Bock*, 127 S. Ct. 910, 922-23 (2007); *Woodford v. Ngo*, 126 S. Ct. 2378, 2386 (2006). “Compliance with prison grievance procedures, therefore, is all that is required by the PLRA to ‘properly exhaust.’” *Jones*, 127 S. Ct. at 922-23.

MDOC Policy Directive 03.02.130 (effective Dec. 19, 2003)<sup>1</sup>, sets forth the applicable grievance procedures for prisoners in MDOC custody at the time relevant to this complaint. Inmates must first attempt to resolve a problem orally within two business days of becoming aware of the grievable issue, unless prevented by circumstances beyond his or her control *Id.* at ¶ R. If oral resolution is unsuccessful, the inmate may proceed to Step I of the grievance process and submit a completed grievance form within five business days of the attempted oral resolution. *Id.* at ¶¶ R, X. The Policy Directive also provides the following directions for completing grievance forms: “The issues shall be stated briefly. Information provided shall be limited to the facts involving the issue being grieved (i.e., who, what, when, where, why, how). Dates, times, places and names of all those involved in the issue being grieved are to be included.” *Id.* at ¶ T (emphasis in original). The inmate submits the grievance to a designated grievance coordinator, who assigns it to a respondent. *Id.* at ¶ Y.

If the inmate is dissatisfied with the Step I response, or does not receive a timely response, he may appeal to Step II by obtaining an appeal form within five business days of the

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<sup>1</sup>The MDOC amended Policy Directive 03.02.130 on July 9, 2007. However, the 2003 version of the policy directive was in effect at all times applicable to this lawsuit.

response, or if no response was received, within five days after the response was due. *Id.* at ¶¶ R, DD. The respondent at Step II is designated by the policy, *e.g.*, the regional health administrator for a medical care grievances. *Id.* at ¶ FF. If the inmate is still dissatisfied with the Step II response, or does not receive a timely Step II response, he may appeal to Step III using the same appeal form. *Id.* at ¶¶ R, HH. The Step III form shall be sent within ten business days after receiving the Step II response, or if no Step II response was received, within ten business days after the date the Step II response was due. *Id.* at ¶ HH. The Prisoner Affairs Section is the respondent for Step III grievances on behalf of the MDOC director. *Id.* at ¶ II. Time limitations shall be adhered to by the inmate and staff at all steps of the grievance process. *Id.* at ¶ U. “The total grievance process from the point of filing a Step I grievance to providing a Step III response shall be completed within 90 calendar days unless an extension has been approved . . . .” *Id.*

In addition, the grievance policy provides that, where the grievance alleges staff brutality or corruption, the grievance may be submitted directly to Step III. *Id.* at ¶ S. In such instances, the grievance must be filed within the time limits prescribed for filing grievances at Step I. *Id.*

As noted by Defendants in their brief, Plaintiff could not have exhausted his administrative remedies with regard to the claimed incidents which occurred after he filed this action on January 10, 2008. In his response to the motion for summary judgment, Plaintiff states that he merely raised the new claims to show a continued pattern of behavior by Defendant Turner and his colleagues. Therefore, the court will disregard any claims involving allegations which occurred after January 10, 2008.

Defendants also state that they are entitled to summary judgment with regard to Plaintiff’s claim that Defendant Turner read his mail. Incoming mail has long been recognized to

pose a greater threat to prison order and security than outgoing mail. *Thornburgh v. Abbott*, 490 U.S. 401 (1989); *Turner v. Safley*, 482 U.S. 78 (1987).

A prisoner's right to receive mail is protected by the First Amendment, but prison officials may impose restrictions that are reasonably related to security or other legitimate penological objectives. *See Knop v. Johnson*, 977 F.2d 996, 1012 (6th Cir.1992). As we have noted, "prison officials may open prisoners' incoming mail pursuant to a uniform and evenly applied policy with an eye to maintaining prison security." *Lavado v. Keohane*, 992 F.2d 601, 607 (6th Cir.1993). However, prison officials who open and read incoming mail in an arbitrary and capricious fashion violate a prisoner's First Amendment rights. *See Parrish v. Johnson*, 800 F.2d 600, 604 (6th Cir.1986).

*Sallier v. Brooks*, 343 F.3d 868, 873-74 (6th Cir. 2003).

Plaintiff claims that there is no legitimate penological interest in allowing prison officials to read his incoming mail. The undersigned notes that the Sixth Circuit has not decided the degree to which prison inmates retain their freedom of association. *Long v. Norris*, 929 F.2d 1111, 1118 (6th Cir.), *cert. denied*, 502 U.S. 863 (1991). However, other courts have held that an inmate's right to mail letters to his family or friends is not absolute, and that a prisoner has no more right to free postal service than does the ordinary citizen. *Corby v. Conboy*, 457 F.2d 251, 254 (2d Cir. 1972); *Williams v. Ward*, 404 F. Supp. 170, 172 (S.D. N.Y. 1975); *Chiarello v. Bohlinger*, 391 F. Supp. 1153, 1154 (S.D. N.Y. 1975), *aff'd*, 573 F.2d 1288 (1978). Any First Amendment rights retained by prisoners upon incarceration must yield to "the legitimate penological objectives of the corrections system," such as order, security, or rehabilitation. *Turner v. Safley*, 482 U.S. 78, 89 (1987); *Bazzetta v. McGinnis*, 124 F.3d 774, 780 (6th Cir. 1997), *cert. denied*, 524 U.S. 953 (1998). There is a valid, rational connection between a policy that allows incoming mail to a prison to be opened and inspected by prison officials and the order, security and rehabilitation needs of the prisoners. *Turner*, 482 U.S. at 90.

The mail at issue in this case was not legal mail, but was a letter from Plaintiff's aunt. In his complaint, Plaintiff alleges that Defendant Turner was responsible for handling mail for all wings in the housing unit. Defendants assert that Defendant Turner opened the piece of mail in question pursuant to a uniform and evenly applied policy with an eye to maintaining prison security. In response to this assertion, Plaintiff states that there is no penological justification for reading his mail and that Defendant Turner should merely have delivered the mail. Plaintiff also asserts that staff at AMF commonly read prisoner mail and magazines for their own recreational pleasure.

Plaintiff states that the opening and inspection of mail in one location and delivering it in another violates Policy Directive 05.03.118 (CC). However, 05.03.118(CC) states:

All incoming mail that is not receiving special handling pursuant to Paragraphs DD and EE shall be opened in one location at each facility and inspected at that location to determine if it contains money, controlled substances or other physical contraband. All physical contraband shall be confiscated prior to delivery of the mail to the prisoner. The mail's written content also shall be skimmed and, if it appears from skimming the content that the mail may violate this policy, the item shall be read to determine if it is allowed. All incoming mail from one prisoner to another shall be read.

Policy Directive 05.03.118(CC) (01/01/2006). Therefore, Plaintiff is incorrect in his interpretation of policy, which merely requires that all mail which is not subject to special handling be opened and inspected in one location at each facility.

As noted above, Plaintiff claims that Defendant Turner opened and read his mail from his aunt, and then told another corrections officer to tell Plaintiff that his aunt did not know what the hell she was talking about. Defendants correctly note that MDOC policy provides for the opening and inspection of non-legal mail outside the presence of Plaintiff, which is reasonably related to the legitimate penological need for prison security. Therefore, in the opinion of the undersigned, Defendant Turner's conduct does not rise to the level of a constitutional violation.

In addition, the use of harassing or degrading language by a prison official, although unprofessional and deplorable, does not rise to constitutional dimensions. *See Ivey v. Wilson*, 832 F.2d 950, 954-55 (6th Cir. 1987); *see also Johnson v. Dellatifa*, 357 F.3d 539, 546 (6th Cir. 2004) (harassment and verbal abuse do not constitute the type of infliction of pain that the Eighth Amendment prohibits); *Violett v. Reynolds*, No. No. 02-6366, 2003 WL 22097827, at \*3 (6th Cir. Sept. 5, 2003) (verbal abuse and harassment do not constitute punishment that would support an Eighth Amendment claim); *Thaddeus-X v. Langley*, No. 96-1282, 1997 WL 205604, at \*1 (6th Cir. Apr. 24, 1997)(verbal harassment is insufficient to state a claim); *Murray v. United States Bureau of Prisons*, No. 95-5204, 1997 WL 34677, at \*3 (6th Cir. Jan. 28, 1997) (“Although we do not condone the alleged statements, the Eighth Amendment does not afford us the power to correct every action, statement or attitude of a prison official with which we might disagree.”); *Clark v. Turner*, No. 96-3265, 1996 WL 721798, at \*2 (6th Cir. Dec. 13, 1996) (“Verbal harassment and idle threats are generally not sufficient to constitute an invasion of an inmate’s constitutional rights.”); *Brown v. Toombs*, No. 92-1756, 1993 WL 11882 (6th Cir. Jan. 21, 1993) (“Brown’s allegation that a corrections officer used derogatory language and insulting racial epithets is insufficient to support his claim under the Eighth Amendment.”). Accordingly, the fact that a corrections officer made a comment about Plaintiff’s aunt fails to state an Eighth Amendment claim.

Defendants also state that they are entitled to summary judgment on Plaintiff’s Eighth Amendment claim against Defendant Wickstrom for an alleged improper touching. The Eighth Amendment imposes a constitutional limitation on the power of the states to punish those convicted of crimes. Punishment may not be “barbarous” nor may it contravene society’s “evolving standards of decency.” *Rhodes v. Chapman*, 452 U.S. 337, 346 (1981). The Amendment, therefore, prohibits conduct by prison officials that involves the “unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain.” *Ivey v.*

*Wilson*, 832 F.2d 950, 954 (6th Cir. 1987) (per curiam) (quoting *Rhodes*, 452 U.S. at 346). The deprivation alleged must result in the denial of the “minimal civilized measure of life’s necessities.” *Rhodes*, 452 U.S. at 347; *see also Wilson v. Yaklich*, 148 F.3d 596, 600-601 (6th Cir. 1998). The Eighth Amendment is only concerned with “deprivations of essential food, medical care, or sanitation” or “other conditions intolerable for prison confinement.” *Rhodes*, 452 U.S. at 348 (citation omitted). Moreover, “Not every unpleasant experience a prisoner might endure while incarcerated constitutes cruel and unusual punishment within the meaning of the Eighth Amendment.” *Ivey*, 832 F.2d at 954.

“[B]ecause the sexual harassment or abuse of an inmate by a corrections officer can never serve a legitimate penological purpose and may well result in severe physical and psychological harm, such abuse can, in certain circumstances, constitute the ‘unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain’ forbidden by the Eighth Amendment.” *Freitas v. Ault*, 109 F.3d 1335, 1338 (8th Cir. 1997) (quoted cases omitted). “To prevail on a constitutional claim of sexual harassment, an inmate must therefore prove, as an objective matter, that the alleged abuse or harassment caused ‘pain’ and, as a subjective matter, that the officer in question acted with a sufficiently culpable state of mind.” *Freitas*, 109 F.3d at 1338 (citing *Hudson v. McMillian*, 503 U.S. 1, 8 (1992)).

Circuit courts consistently have held that sexual harassment, absent contact or touching, does not satisfy the objective requirement because such conduct does not constitute the unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain. *See Morales v. Mackalm*, 278 F.3d 126, 132 (2d Cir. 2002) (allegations that prison guard asked prisoner to have sex with her and to masturbate in front of her and other female staffers did not rise to level of Eighth Amendment violation); *Barney v. Pulsipher*, 143 F.3d 1299, 1311 n.11 (10th Cir. 1998) (allegations that county jailer subjected female

prisoners to severe verbal sexual harassment and intimidation was not sufficient to state a claim under the Eighth Amendment); *Howard v. Everett*, No. 99-1277EA, 2000 WL 268493, at \*1 (8th Cir. March 10, 2000) (sexual comments and gestures by prison guards did not constitute unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain); *cf. Seltzer-Bey v. Delo*, 66 F.3d 961, 962-63 (8th Cir. 1995) (allegations that prison guard conducted daily strip searches, made sexual comments about prisoner's penis and buttocks, and rubbed prisoner's buttocks with nightstick were sufficient to withstand motion for summary judgment); *Zander v. McGinnis*, No. 97-1484, 1998 WL 384625, at \*2 (6th Cir. June 19, 1998) (verbal abuse of mouthing "pet names" at prisoner for ten months failed to state an Eighth Amendment claim); *Murray v. United States Bureau of Prisons*, No. 95-5204, 1997 WL 34677, at \*3 (6th Cir. Jan. 28, 1997) (magistrate judge correctly held that verbal abuse in the form of offensive remarks regarding a transsexual prisoner's bodily appearance, transsexualism, and presumed sexual preference cannot state an Eighth Amendment claim).

The Eight Amendment's proscription against cruel and unusual punishment forbids the unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain. *See Hudson v. McMillian*, 503 U.S. 1, 5 (1992). The objective component of an Eighth Amendment claim requires that the pain be serious. *Id.* at 8-9. Although severe or repetitive sexual abuse certainly could qualify under this standard, a single incident of objectionable sexual touching does not meet the objective component of an Eighth Amendment claim. Numerous circuit court decisions, including unpublished opinions of the Sixth Circuit, have held that such allegations are insufficient to state an Eighth Amendment claim. *See, e.g., Jackson v. Madery*, 158 F. App'x 656, 661 (6th Cir. 2005) (correction officer's conduct in allegedly rubbing and grabbing prisoner's buttocks in degrading manner was "isolated, brief, and not severe" and so failed to meet Eighth Amendment standards); *Johnson v. Ward*, No. 99-1596, 2000 WL 659354, at \*1 (6th Cir. May 11, 2000) (male prisoner's claim that a male officer placed his hand

on the prisoner's buttock in a sexual manner and made an offensive sexual remark did not meet the objective component of the Eighth Amendment); *Berryhill v. Schriro*, 137 F.3d 1073, 1075 (8th Cir. 1998) (where inmate failed to assert that he feared sexual abuse, two brief touches to his buttocks could not be construed as sexual assault); *accord Boxer X v. Harris*, 437 F.3d 1107, 1111 (11th Cir. 2006); *Boddie v. Schneider*, 105 F.3d 857, 859-61 (2d Cir. 1997) (court dismissed as inadequate prisoner's claim that female corrections officer made a pass at him, squeezed his hand, touched his penis, called him a "sexy black devil," pressed her breasts against his chest, and pressed against his private parts).

In this case, Plaintiff filed a grievance on Defendant Wickstrom which Defendants offer as an exhibit to their motion for summary judgment. According to the grievance, Plaintiff claimed that Defendant Wickstrom tried to grab his penis and butt area because Plaintiff was wearing a towel under his shorts. Plaintiff states:

On the date above, I got take in [sic] to (SCC), at the time I was washing up & etc . . . Wickstrom seen [sic] the towel around my wist [sic], he then grab around me trying to take the towel off hittin' my penis & butt area, state in [sic] I can't have this on & etc . . . I said o.k. Then I stated, men [sic] this is sexual harassment, he said, yeah right! Go write your grievance.

(See Defendants' Exhibit A.)

Defendants also offer the affidavit of Defendant Turner, in which he attests that on January 16, 2007, he applied restraints to Plaintiff through the food slot of his door. When Plaintiff came out of his cell, Defendant Turner shook him down and discovered a towel around Plaintiff's waist and under his orange athletic shorts. Defendant Turner attempted to remove the towel by pulling on it. Plaintiff then claimed that Defendant Turner was grabbing his penis, so Defendant Turner ordered Plaintiff to return to his cell and remove the towel. After Plaintiff complied with this

order, Defendant Turner reapplied the restraints and conducted a second shakedown. Plaintiff was then escorted away. (See Defendants' Exhibit C, ¶¶ 4-5.)

In the opinion of the undersigned, such conduct does not rise to the level of an Eighth Amendment violation. It appears from Plaintiff's allegations that Defendant Wickstrom may have bumped his penis, which could have been entirely accidental. The fact that Defendant Wickstrom may have responded to Plaintiff's complaint in a sarcastic manner, does not require a finding that this conduct constituted sexual harassment.

Plaintiff also filed a grievance asserting that Defendant Wickstrom was continuing to threaten him with sexual assault in violation of prison policy. However, acts of verbal sexual harassment, standing alone, are insufficient to state a claim under the Eighth Amendment. *See Morales*, 278 F.3d at 132; *Zander*, 1998 WL 384625, at \*2. Therefore, Plaintiff's allegations fail to state an Eighth Amendment claim against Defendant Wickstrom.

The undersigned notes that Defendants fail to address Plaintiff's retaliation claims in their motion for summary judgment. Retaliation based upon a prisoner's exercise of his or her constitutional rights violates the Constitution. *See Thaddeus-X v. Blatter*, 175 F.3d 378, 394 (6th Cir.1999) (en banc). In order to set forth a First Amendment retaliation claim, a plaintiff must establish that: (1) he was engaged in protected conduct; (2) an adverse action was taken against him that would deter a person of ordinary firmness from engaging in that conduct; and (3) the adverse action was motivated, at least in part, by the protected conduct. *Thaddeus-X*, 175 F.3d at 394. Moreover, Plaintiff must be able to prove that the exercise of the protected right was a substantial or motivating factor in the defendant's alleged retaliatory conduct. *See Smith v. Campbell*, 250 F.3d 1032, 1037 (6th Cir. 2001) (citing *Mount Healthy City Sch. Dist. Bd. of Educ. v. Doyle*, 429 U.S. 274, 287 (1977)).

Plaintiff claims that Defendants' conduct was motivated by a desire to retaliate against him for filing grievances. The filing of a prison grievance is constitutionally-protected conduct for which a prisoner cannot be retaliated against. *See Smith v. Campbell*, 250 F.3d 1032, 1037 (6th Cir. 2001); *Hall v. Nusholtz*, No. 99-2442, 2000 WL 1679458, at \*2 (6th Cir. Nov. 1, 2000); *Burton v. Rowley*, No. 00-1144, 2000 WL 1679463, at \*2 (6th Cir. Nov. 1, 2000).

The adverseness inquiry is an objective one, and does not depend on how a particular plaintiff reacted. The relevant question is whether the defendants' conduct is "capable of deterring a person of ordinary firmness;" the plaintiff need not show actual deterrence. *Bell v. Johnson*, 308 F.3d 594, 606 (6th Cir. 2002). In the opinion of the undersigned, the alleged misconduct on the part of Defendants is insufficient to deter a person of ordinary firmness from engaging in protected conduct. Therefore, they are entitled to dismissal of Plaintiff's retaliation claims.

Defendants claim that they are entitled to dismissal of Plaintiff's official capacity claims pursuant to the Eleventh Amendment. Any claims against the individually-named Defendants in their official capacities do not state a claim upon which relief can be granted. *See Will v. Michigan Department of State Police*, 491 U.S. 58 (1989) (claims against a state agency or an official in his/her official capacity are claims against the state, and are not claims against a "person" subject to Section 1983 liability); *Frederick v. Abramajtys*, No. 94-1935, 1995 WL 564321, \*\*1 (6th Cir. Sept. 21, 1995) (unpublished). Moreover, the Eleventh Amendment bars suit against the State or one of its agencies in federal court unless the state has given express consent, regardless of the relief sought. *Pennhurst State School & Hospital v. Halderman*, 465 U.S. 89, 100 (1984), overruled in part on other grounds, *Will*, 491 U.S. 58; *Alabama v. Pugh*, 438 U.S. 781, 782 (1978) (State and

Board of Corrections).<sup>2</sup> The State of Michigan has not consented to civil rights suits in the federal courts. *See Abick v. Michigan*, 803 F.2d 874, 877 (6th Cir. 1986). The Eleventh Amendment therefore bars official-capacity suits for damages against its employees. Therefore, any official capacity claims are properly dismissed.

Finally, Defendants claim that they are entitled to qualified immunity. Government officials, performing discretionary functions, generally are shielded from liability for civil damages insofar as their conduct does not violate clearly established statutory or constitutional rights of which a reasonable person would have known. *Dietrich v. Burrows*, 167 F.3d 1007, 1012 (6th Cir. 1999); *Turner v. Scott*, 119 F.3d 425, 429 (6th Cir. 1997); *Noble v. Schmitt*, 87 F.3d 157, 160 (6th Cir. 1996); *Harlow v. Fitzgerald*, 457 U.S. 800, 818 (1982). An “objective reasonableness” test is used to determine whether the official could reasonably have believed his conduct was lawful. *Dietrich*, 167 F.3d at 1012; *Anderson v. Creighton*, 483 U.S. 635, 641 (1987).

The procedure for evaluating claims of qualified immunity is tripartite: First, we determine whether a constitutional violation occurred; second, we determine whether the right that was violated was a clearly established right of which a reasonable person would have known; finally, we determine whether the plaintiff has alleged sufficient facts, and supported the allegations by sufficient evidence, to indicate that what the official allegedly did was objectively unreasonable in light of the clearly established constitutional rights. *Williams v. Mehra*, 186 F.3d 685, 690 (6th Cir. 1999).

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<sup>2</sup> The Sixth Circuit has held that since an official capacity suit for retroactive relief, such as monetary damages, is deemed to be against the State, whose officers are the nominal Defendants, the claim is barred by the Eleventh Amendment. *Doe v. Wigginton*, 21 F.3d 733, 736-737 (6th Cir. 1994).

When determining whether a right is clearly established, this court must look first to decisions of the United States Supreme Court, then to decisions of the Sixth Circuit and to other courts within this Circuit, and finally to decisions of other circuits. *Dietrich*, 167 F.3d at 1012. An official action is not necessarily protected by qualified immunity merely because the very action in question has not previously been held to be unlawful. Rather, in light of pre-existing law, the unlawfulness of the official's conduct must be apparent. *Dietrich*, 167 F.3d at 1012; *Wegener v. City of Covington*, 933 F.2d 390, 392 (6th Cir. 1991).

When making a qualified immunity analysis, the facts must be interpreted in the light most favorable to the plaintiff. Part of the analysis is to determine whether there are any genuinely disputed questions of material fact. *Kain v. Nesbitt*, 156 F.3d 669, 672 (6th Cir. 1998). Where there is a genuinely disputed question of fact, it is for the trier of fact to resolve, not the judge. "This would be true notwithstanding that the trial judge found the [defendant] officer to be more credible than the plaintiff because it is not for the court to make credibility determinations at this stage of the proceeding." *Id.*

The operation of the qualified immunity standard depends substantially upon the level of generality at which the relevant legal rule is to be identified.

The contours of the right must be sufficiently clear that a reasonable official would understand that what he is doing violates that right. This is not to say that an official action is protected by qualified immunity unless the very action in question has previously been held unlawful, but it is to say that in light of the preexisting law the unlawfulness must be apparent.

*Anderson*, 483 U.S. at 639-40. See also *Durham v. Nu'Man*, 97 F.3d 862, 866 (6th Cir. 1996), cert. denied, 520 U.S. 1157 (1997).

The Sixth Circuit has observed:

A right is not considered clearly established unless it has been authoritatively decided by the United States Supreme Court, the Court of Appeals, or the highest court of the state in which the alleged constitutional violation occurred.

*Durham*, 97 F.3d at 866 (citing *Robinson v. Bibb*, 840 F.2d 349, 351 (6th Cir. 1988)).

Thus qualified immunity is not triggered only where the very action in question was previously held unlawful. *Anderson*, 483 U.S. at 639-40. Rather, the test is whether the contours of the right were sufficiently clear that a reasonable official would understand that what he is doing violated plaintiff's federal rights. *Id.*

Furthermore, a defendant need not actively participate in unlawful conduct in order to be liable under Section 1983. Rather, a defendant may be liable where he has a duty to protect a plaintiff and fails to comply with this duty. *Durham*, 97 F.3d at 866-868 (holding that a nurse and a security guard at a state hospital may be liable under Section 1983 where they do not take action to prevent a patient from being beaten). See also *McHenry v. Chadwick*, 896 F.2d 184 (6th Cir. 1990)(a correctional officer who observes an unlawful beating may be liable under Section 1983 even though he did not actively participate in the beating), and *Bruner v. Dunaway*, 684 F.2d 422 (6th Cir. 1982), cert. denied sub nom., *Bates v. Bruner*, 459 U.S. 1171 (1983)(police officers who stood by and observed an unlawful beating by fellow officers could be held liable under Section 1983).

When faced with a qualified immunity defense, the court must first determine whether or not the plaintiff has stated a claim upon which relief can be granted. *Siegert v. Gilley*, 500 U.S. 226, 232 (1991); *Turner*, 119 F.3d at 429. If the court answers that question in the affirmative, the court goes on to determine whether or not the right allegedly violated was clearly established.

*Turner*, 119 F.3d at 429. These are both purely legal questions. The immunity issue should not be resolved if there are factual disputes on which the issue of immunity turns such that it cannot be determined before trial whether the defendants' conduct violated clearly established rights. *Hall v. Shipley*, 932 F.2d 1147, 1154 (6th Cir. 1991). As noted above, Defendants have shown that there is no genuine issue of material fact and they are therefore entitled to qualified immunity.

In summary, in the opinion of the undersigned, Plaintiff has failed to sustain his burden of proof in response to Defendants' motion for summary judgment. Accordingly, it is recommended that Defendants' motion for summary judgment (Docket #35) be granted and this case be dismissed in its entirety. In addition, should the court adopt the report and recommendation in this case, Plaintiff's motion for appointment of counsel (Docket #41) is properly denied as moot.

NOTICE TO PARTIES: Objections to this Report and Recommendation must be served on opposing parties and filed with the Clerk of the Court within ten (10) days of receipt of this Report and Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b); W.D. Mich. LCivR 72.3(b). Failure to file timely objections constitutes a waiver of any further right to appeal. *United States v. Walters*, 638 F.2d 947 (6th Cir. 1981). See also *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140 (1985).

/s/ Timothy P. Greeley  
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TIMOTHY P. GREELEY  
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

Dated: June 19, 2009